Abstract EFTA 2013

Topic: New family forms – challenges to family therapists

Family building through sperm donation: the (de-)involvement of the anonymous sperm donor.

Wyverkens, E[1].; Van Parys, H[1].; Provoost, V[2].; De Sutter, P[3].; Pennings G.[2]; Buysse, A[1].

[1]Ghent University, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Gent, Belgium.
[2]Ghent University, Bioethics Institute Ghent, Gent, Belgium.
[3]Ghent University Hospital, Department of Reproductive Medicine, Gent, Belgium.

Keywords: donor conception families, qualitative research, thematic analysis

Building a family through gamete donation challenges our understanding of the nuclear family model on several levels. Firstly, donor conceived children are genetically related to only one of their parents. Secondly, in contrast to natural conception, reproduction is made possible by using a gamete donor. The involvement of *unknown* gamete donors is usually thought of as limited to the reproductive process and not influencing family life. In our study we investigated how couples position the anonymous sperm donor in the process of building their family. We conducted semi-structured interviews with ten couples (20 participants), recruited via the Department of Reproductive Medicine of the Ghent University Hospital. All couples had at least one child conceived via donor insemination, ranging from 7 to 10 years old. Data were analyzed using systematic inductive thematic analysis. The participants in our study seem to both downgrade and underline the importance of the donor: he is perceived as the provider of sperm and merely a means to beget their child, while at the same time he also gets a significant position in their family story. These donor positions seem to develop over time and are challenged in specific situations (e.g. pregnancy, curiosity of the child, etc.). Current findings are interpreted from a systemic and dialectical perspective. This study illustrates the challenging and dynamic process of the donor positioning and can inspire family therapists today.